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ABSTRACT

Organizational change in the context of nontraditional education is discussed, with attention to Athabasca University (AU), which offers external degree programs in Canada. After considering the evolution of the role of academic faculty at AU, attention is directed to the role of research in the innovative, nontraditional university. Although AU's undergraduate degree requirements may be completed entirely through home study, students are provided a variety of support services, the most important of which is a telephone tutor. AU changed its approach to managing academic affairs: home study editors and instructional developers are no longer in separate organizational units. Original goals were to be innovative by promoting interdisciplinary inquiry and by developing curricula responsive to adult learners' needs. However, cost and time constraints resulted in course content and program development being patterned on existing offerings in other universities. The reasons for these outcomes are explored. Consideration is also given to research activities and terms and conditions of employment for academic staff. The case study is placed in the context of several paradigms of organizational decision-making: the rational/bureaucratic model, the democratic/collegial model, the political model, and the anarchic model. (SW)

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Non-Traditional Education And Organizational Change: The Case of Athabasca University

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Presented at the AERA/ASHE Conference
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PART 1 - SESSION THEME AND OVERVIEW

Session Theme

The purpose of this symposium is to examine organizational change in the context of non-traditional, university level education. Our line of inquiry is through an examination of the issue of organizational change in a non-traditional university, using a distance education university as a case study. The first presentation will provide a general description of the context in which the university began its institutional life, and the aspirations that were initially held out for it. This presentation will also provide an overview of how the university is currently constituted.

Session Organization

The next two presentations describe several problematic issues that arose as the university developed that are especially illustrative of the dynamics of the organizational change that occurred. The first presentation describes the evolution of the role of the academic faculty. Initially, the university proposed to "buy" the academic expertise to produce the desired home study courses by retaining academic staff from other institutions on a consultancy basis. However, for a variety of reasons that will be elaborated upon in this presentation, this original conceptualization of academic staffing gradually gave way to an academic staffing organizational model that is analogous to what one finds in traditional universities. The second presentation has a dual thrust. It begins by describing the dilemma of the role of research in an innovative, non-traditional university. The heart of the dilemma is reconciling a point of view that maintains that an innovative institution should: (i) be innovative with respect to its research role; (ii) de-emphasize the "usual" traditional research and scholarly inquiry (in the same sense that the academic role would have been de-emphasized) in favour of "action oriented" research which is more compatible with institutional mission; and (iii) eschew any aspiration of becoming like traditional universities with respect to research —and the traditional point of view that maintains that research, as it is conventionally regarded, is a defining characteristic of any university. As such, research is to be encouraged and valued. The second part of this second presentation deals with the challenge of framing terms and conditions of employment for academic staff that would be appropriate and

effective given the unusual mandate of the university.

The session concludes with a presentation that attempts to place the case studies in the context of several paradigms of organizational decision-making that help to explain the direction of the changes. Of particular interest are: The rational/bureaucratic model (From Max Weber and many others; in higher education, notably Stroup, 1966); the democratic/collegial model (Millett, 1962); the political model (Baldridge, 1971); and the anarchic model (Cohen and March, 1974). This presentation concludes by offering provocative conclusions about the unintended consequences of organizational decisions that reflect both on the case study and on the usefulness of the organizational theories presented.

An Introduction to Athabasca University

Athabasca University is a distance education university that offers undergraduate, baccalaureate degrees in Liberal Studies and Administrative Studies. Students are able to complete their degrees entirely through home study. However, students are provided with a variety of support services, the most important of which is a telephone tutor whom the student may call collect to discuss problems related to the course of study being taken or to its administration. The university also offers a Bachelor of General Studies degree, which is an unstructured degree program that students can partially or totally complete through the accrediting of university-level study undertaken elsewhere. The University regards itself as an "open-learning system" (Wedemeyer, 1974) in the sense that: (i) the University has eliminated the constraint that a student is required to present himself or herself at a special location in order to receive instruction; (ii) through the medium of the home study course package, and minimizing administrative requirements, students direct their own learning at a pace of their own choosing; and (iii) the University has set no academic requirement for admission to the University; students must, however, be 18 years of age or older.

Athabasca University was originally created in the late 1960's as an undergraduate campus-based university offering programs of study in the liberal arts and in science. As such, it was expected to relieve the other local university—the University of Alberta—of the pressures of the

burgeoning enrolments occurring at that time. The original conception of the University was that it would be innovative. Programs of study (and the courses they subsumed) were to be interdisciplinary and were to have been delivered using the latest in audio-visual communications technologies. The University was to have been organized around a system of colleges, and the physical configuration of the University would have consisted of interconnected modules, with each module containing a college. The University was also expected to be innovative with respect to governance.

However, a fall-off in enrolments in the early 1970's, and the replacement of a 35 year old Social Credit government by a fledgeling Conservative government lead to a reconsideration of the establishment of Athabasca University. All planning was suspended and the Order-in-Council under which the University was established was rescinded. After some time and following much negotiation, planning was permitted to resume and was authorized by a new Order-in-Council. However, the terms of reference had changed considerably. The university officials were only authorized to undertake a study of the role that the University could assume within the post-secondary system in Alberta to provide an educational service that would not otherwise be available. As a result of this study, the provincial government agreed to re-establish the University on a five-year trial basis as an open, distance education university. If the concept proved viable, then the University would be granted permanent status at the end of the pilot project phase.

The spirit of educational reform and innovation that underlay the early planning of the "first" Athabasca University carried over to the planning of its reincarnated form. Courses of studies were to be approached from an interdisciplinary point of view, instruction was to be delivered by innovative delivery mechanisms, and the University would experiment with alternative forms of governance. It was about this time that the University also adopted as a philosophical over-lay, a commitment to being an "open-learning system" in the style set forth by Wedemeyer (1974) among others. In addition, the expectation arose (albeit in an organic, developmental fashion) that the University would systematically study itself since it was a living laboratory in which many educational innovations were being tested through practical application. This expectation lead to a continuing and long standing concern regarding the role of

research within the University, and the kind and amount of support that should be accorded "institutional research" as opposed to the more traditional form of research and scholarly activity.

Organization and Administration

Peters (1971) has characterized distance education as a form of "industrialized" education—and so it is in the sense that much of the business of distance education is producing a product, namely the home study course package. Production of this product requires that various kinds of expertise be brought to bear on the process and further requires that these various kinds of expertise be managed so as to yield the desired result. As a minimum, the process requires a subject matter expert to generate the content of a course. However, in its original conception of the process, A.U. added: an editor whose expert contribution would be substantive and copy editing; a visual designer whose expert contribution would be to interpret the instruction visually so as to facilitate a student's learning the course material (as well as to look after aspects of the physical production of the course); and an instructional developer who would advise on instructional strategies, assessment, and the sequencing of course material to facilitate learning.

In addition, the instructional developer was conceived as the manager of the process that coordinated these various contributions to produce the home study course package. Under this conceptualization the University would have a core of instructional developers and visual designers, and editors. There would be few full-time academic staff, with most of the subject matter contributions coming from academics recruited from outside of the university on term definite, task specific contracts. The telephone tutorial support required during delivery would be arranged for on the same basis.

The following figure is a chart that shows the organizational structure that existed at the time.

[See FIGURE 1]

Instructional developers, visual designers, editors and subject matter experts (when continuing members of staff) would be drawn into course teams from their respective organizational homes under a matrix style of management. The organizational home for a course team (while it existed) was "course development"—a unit that was headed by a Director in whom was vested budgetary control for all expenditures associated with producing a course.

Organizational Changes

Over time, and for reasons that will be discussed in the other presentations, A.U. has changed the way in which it manages and administers its academic affairs. Course development and delivery functions are now located within the two program areas. There are no longer separate organizational units housing editors and instructional developers. Editors and instructional developers have been assigned to each program area and they are responsible administratively to the respective Director of Studies (who is dean-like in respect of his responsibilities). Courses may or may not have an editor or an ID—although it is rare to forego having an editor. The University has concertedly and systematically expanded its academic staff in an effort to have at least one faculty member for each of the subject areas in which the University offers courses. Although the University relies substantially on these staff to develop courses (and to administer their delivery), it still continues to rely heavily on contracted arrangements. However, academic activities are now faculty centered rather than ID centered. Administrative decisions regarding courses are now the responsibility of the particular academic staff member to whom the course has been assigned. Problems arising within course teams are arbitrated by the Directors of Study.

Figure 2 shows the organizational context as it currently exists.

[See FIGURE 2]

Curriculum

In the first three or four home study courses produced by the University, great effort was devoted to ensuring that they followed the spirit of interdisciplinary inquiry expected for the campus-based version of A.U. However, under the combined pressures of having to produce

courses more quickly and more cheaply, and having these courses transfer to other universities, A.U. quickly dropped this commitment. As a result, course content is now very conventional and often is formulated on the basis of what is being offered elsewhere.

As the University moved to embrace the Instructional Systems Development model, it adopted a needs assessment philosophy with respect to selecting and developing courses. This philosophy also carried over into considerations of programs of study. Specifically, the University began to follow an avowed policy of curriculum selection and development based on the characteristics and needs of its adult students. This policy has now been superceded by a conventional academic style of curriculum and program development. Programs are now largely defined by reference to existing programs in other universities and courses are selected to "fit" into programs.

Governance

When the University was originally established, it was expected to be innovative and experimental with respect to its governance structure as well as with respect to curriculum and instructional methods. Consequently, once the University decided that it was going to be an open, distance education university (and given what at the time was a very small scale operation), it settled upon a unicameral system of governance. Under this system, powers traditionally vested in a University Senate, a Board of Governors and a General Faculties Council have been vested in a single body called the Governing Council. Initially, the Governing Council was supported by two standing committees—one of them advising with respect to academic policy and procedures, and the other advisory with respect to administrative policy. It was considered, at the time, that this close integration of responsibility and control would facilitate quicker and better decision-making in a small, distance education university.

However, as differences of opinion and conflicts of interest emerged between the "academic interests" of the staff and the "public trusteeship" interests of the Council, pressures mounted for a more clearly defined division of responsibility with some consequent autonomy of decision-making. As a result, the original committee structure has now been replaced with a structure

that is, in essence, bicameral.

Conclusion

Although Athabasca University originally set out very deliberately to be innovative in all those dimensions that characterize a university, over time it has become more and more traditional in what it does and how it conducts its affairs. The remainder of the session will concern itself with why this happened and whether there were, in fact, other alternatives that the University could have chosen to follow. Some questions to be considered are: To what extent were these changes deliberate and to what extent were they simply a product of circumstance? To what extent were the consequences of organizational change intended or unintended, and do they represent organizational evolution with some direction? In general, how does one interpret what happened?

PART 2 - EVOLUTION OF THE FACULTY ROLE

Notwithstanding the lengthy and traumatic gestation period which preceded Athabasca University's birth as a distance education institution, the organizational structure in place in March of 1977 was conceived of in order to facilitate the execution of this mission.

At that time, the institution had just received a report entitled *University Development, Management and Resources* which had been prepared by a senior staff task force and which was to have a major impact on the operation of the university in general and on the respective role of the academic course co-ordinators and instructional developers in particular. Of major concern to the university was the manner in which it was going to expand not only the number of courses it offered, but also the staff which was to be responsible for developing and delivering its courses and programs:

> The services of subject matter specialists [should] be obtained on a consultant or course/project specific contract basis. Such a policy will greatly facilitate the University's speed of response and flexibility in attempting to meet service demands as they are identified. Appointing such staff on a more permanent basis may constrain the institution's ability to respond as required... It is recommended that the role and functions of these staff [course co-ordinators] be examined with a view to minimizing administrative overhead for course delivery. In accordance with the general recommendation concerning subject matter specialists, the terms of such staff [course co-ordinators] should be related to the demand for services...
> It is recommended that these staff members [instructional developers] be given multiple project assignments. It is suggested that they be primarily involved in project planning consultative and

design monitoring activities as opposed to past practice where such personnel were usually involved in the detailed development of one course or project. (pp. 8-10)

The task force believed that the University should not expand its academic staff in order to produce new courses. Rather, in cases where existing course co-ordinators were unable to develop specific courses it should proceed by contracting academics from other institutions to author courses which would then be processed by a team comprised of an instructional developer, a visual designer and a course materials editor. Academic credibility in the delivery phase would be guaranteed by recruiting tutors who would work under the guidance of existing course co-ordinators who had been hired on account of their multi- or interdisciplinary background. Nor was the task force recommending an increase in instructional developers: it believed that the existing number could be better deployed by having them work on several projects at one time, although their involvement in each project would be less intensive than had been the case in the past. At this point in time, the University had 9 academic co-ordinators and 9 instructional developers on fulltime staff. Seven years later, we find that the number of instructional developers has fallen to 8, while the number of academic co-ordinators has expanded to 39. Clearly, the advice recommended by the senior staff task force had proven to be inoperable. Table I shows the distribution of fulltime staff involved in course development since the University's inception:

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF FULL-TIME STAFF

Year	Academics	Instructional Developers	Editors	Administrative Appointments	Courses Available
1984/1985	39	7	5	2	121
1983/1984	35	8	5	2	100
1982/1983	34	8	5	2	91
1981/1982	29	8	5	4	73
1980/1981	24	8	4	6	66
1979/1980					
1978/1979	17	8	2	7	33
1977/1978	13	9	3	7	14
1976/1977	9	9	1	4	8
1975/1976	9	9	1	4	3
1974/1975	5	7	1	4	3
1973/1974	3	7	1	4	-

What occurred to bring about such a dramatic shift in personnel allocation, and what effect did this have on the organization of the institution? These are questions which the next part of the paper addresses.

For the implementation of the task force's recommendations not to have had a negative impact on the volume of course development, it was inevitable that either the instructional developer's contribution to each course development project would be considerably watered down or that some other course team member would take over some of the former's responsibilities. Both in fact occurred.

By adopting a mastery model and by almost reducing the instructional development role to a recipe, the way was paved for experienced course co-ordinators and editors to assume the role of instructional developers themselves. This outcome was facilitated and accelerated by two other factors. Firstly, the organizational structure had always divorced course development responsibility from course delivery responsibility: whereas instructional developers played a key role in developing new courses, they generally played no role at all in delivering these courses to students. Primary responsibility for this rested with the course co-ordinators who, conversely, had not generally been responsible through the developmental stage of the course. Secondly, and of equal significance, the organizational structure was not conducive to an efficient and productive course development system. Budgetary authority and resource allocation for course development projects rested with the Director, Course/Program Development even though the disciplinary expertise (course co-ordinators) was in many instances located in a parallel division. Under such a matrix, the Director, Course Development was answerable for resources (course co-ordinators) over whom he had no control.

Conversely, in instances where the course co-ordinators were also the course authors, neither they nor their Head had control over the allocation and time commitments of instructional developers, editors and visual designers. The best way out of this dilemma, and the one followed by the most productive course authors/course co-ordinators of the 1977-1981 period, was to bypass the system wherever possible and to minimize the role of other course team members.

As new courses came on stream, the institution had to facilitate their delivery. Since this was one of the primary responsibilities of the course co-ordinator (the others being course development and research), it followed that new positions had to be created if the new courses were to be offered. The numeric growth and strength of the academic sectors therefore resulted from the increased course offerings, but these new hirings themselves led to more course development and to requests for additional hirings once again. At the same time, the University decided in 1978 to create an Applied Studies area which by 1982 was to have in place a three year Bachelor of Administration degree. The emergence of this new program, together with the dramatic increase in academic staff which was occurring in the Liberal Studies area raised two other problems, one concerning the need for a comprehensive curriculum plan, the other centering on the necessity of priorizing and allocating the secondary course development resource personnel (instructional developers, editors, and visual designers) whose numbers had not been allowed to grow at a similar pace.

The first problem was addressed by the creation in 1981 of the Liberal Studies Area, an organizational entity which resulted from the amalgamation of three academic units (Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences). Like his counterpart in Administrative Studies, the Director of Liberal Studies became responsible for the development and delivery of all liberal studies courses. From this point on, one can say that academic decisions governing program planning, course development priority setting, and the priorization of new academic staffing requests have rested with the academic faculty.

It was not, however, until 1983 that the organizational structure was to vest all but complete responsibility for resource allocation pertaining to course development in the academic areas. This was done by disbanding the Instructional Development and Editorial Units, and by re-assigning their resources, both pecuniary and human to the Liberal Studies and Administrative Studies Areas.

Finally, in 1984, the most recent organizational change occurred in order to clarify the ambiguity which part-time telephone tutors faced: although they worked most closely with the

course co-ordinators, they reported to the Co-ordinator, Tutorial Services who was housed in a unit called Regional and Tutorial Services. Since many of the administrative duties of Tutorial Services were personnel-related, these have now been handed over to the central personnel division. By placing one Co-ordinator of Tutorial Services in each academic area, the relationship between tutors and course co-ordinators has been clarified and strengthened.

By far the most controversial, contentious and hotly debated of the above mentioned organizational changes involved the dissolution of the Instructional Development Unit. In order to gain greater control of the course development process, several of the academics had called for the disbanding of this organizational entity at the time of the amalgamation of the Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences units.

At that time, however, the executive officers had preferred to hand over greater academic control to the Areas of Study by changing the committee structures. Two years later it became evident that certain goals could only be achieved by what was judged to be a monumental change: the re-organization of the units which contained the instructional developers and editors. The symbolism of the integration of the instructional developers into the academic areas cannot be overemphasized: a group of individuals who during the 1970's had belonged to a unit which was considered to be at the heart of the institution found themselves incorporated by the very units which had taken over this pivotal role from them. The shift in the power base of the university did not, of course, occur overnight, but the reflection of this change in a new organizational structure truly emphasized that the institution of the 80's differed dramatically from its predecessor of the 1970's.

The emergence of a more traditional institution which differed from its sister institutions primarily on account of its method of delivering courses was evident not only in the organization of the university, its faculty and its course/programme offerings, but also in the expectations which the academic staff held for the opportunity to undertake research and for other aspects of the role traditionally held by academics. The next part of this paper addresses these issues.

PART 3 - RESEARCH AND TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Research

Research productivity is a usual and important expectation of faculty. Indeed, mediocrity in the classroom and isolation from the community are often cited as indicators of the fervour with which some scholars exhibit a predisposition to their research—and only their research. Of course, traditional universities regard research as integral to the life of their respective institutions balancing off the mandate of the institution (i.e., as a public or private institution dedicated to undergraduate education, professional programs, or graduate studies, et cetera) with the research expectations communicated to faculty.

In its earlier years Athabasca University offered little inducement to its academic staff to engage in disciplinary research. Terms and conditions of employment (the antecedent of the labor contract of today) offered little more than a letter of offer of employment. While the small number of academics on staff were free to carry on their own personal research plans, the overwhelming priority of the institution was the development and delivery of distance-based courses and little collegial priority was given to research. However, as the institution evolved, additional academic staff were recruited to both the Liberal Studies area and to the newly-approved Administrative Studies area (post 1979). Slowly, existing terms and conditions were fleshed out over this period as well, such that the guidelines for continuing appointment (tenure) and promotion pertaining to academic staff reflected the need for more substantial research productivity. The dilemma was apparent in several cases at Athabasca University. A scientist active in his discipline concentrated his time on the development and co-ordination of physical sciences courses. Since promotion to the level of associate and full professor includes an external review process, the staff member, who otherwise met the requirements for promotion had his application rejected on the grounds of insufficient research productivity—probably a valid argument in a more traditional institution but not so in this milieu. The relative immaturity of Athabasca University coupled with its somewhat unique mandate and past predisposition for poorly documented terms of employment all were contributing factors to the mixed message which this scho-

lar and others undoubtedly received. In this instance, the obvious injustice of the situation was eventually rectified but it highlighted the need to clarify expectations, rewards, and the responsibilities of both the university and its academic staff.

Throughout Athabasca's history, the definition of what constitutes appropriate research has been problematic. To be sure, the academic co-ordinators clearly identify with disciplinary research as do their peers in more traditional settings. However, the University only recently attempted to review and revise its guidelines for use in the dissemination of research grants and found itself in the middle of a long-standing debate. Many of the instructional development staff who now report to the Directors of Study view their research mandate as more innovative and non-traditional in the sense that "action oriented" research is "in" while traditional disciplinary research is considered inappropriate to the needs of the institution (and their future as I.D.'s!). The university seems to be on the horns of a dilemma—although the traditional academic staff complement now exceeds the I.D. staff many times over, their influence remains and the perceptual differences regarding research are probably as deeply held as ever.

The role of research relating to the unique mandate of the institution also remains somewhat unclear. To what extent can and should such considerations offset the requirement of more traditional research and scholarly activity? The answer(s) are unclear and need further dialogue. Even though the level of distrust between the various academic factions (course co-ordinators and instructional developers) may have diminished, it remains unclear whether the issues described are close to resolution even on an informal level.

While Athabasca University operates under a unique mandate, its responsibility to its faculty (and their reciprocal responsibility as academicians) requires that research both in the traditional disciplinary context as well as respecting distance learning itself needs to be fostered and supported. In one sense, the responsibilities falling upon the shoulders of our faculty go beyond those envisaged in the traditional institution.

Other Conditions of Employment

Concomitant with the evolving role of academics and the emphasis on research have been changes in other terms and conditions of employment.

Describing the evolution of such changes is almost a trivial task. Understanding what has taken place over the past years however is a far more formidable one. Prior to the major changes in the course development model which took place early in 1981, all professional staff—academic, instructional development, editorial and administrative personnel—were entitled to virtually identical leaves, benefits, and salaries. Although academic co-ordinators were usually classified as "academic professionals" along with the majority of instructional developers (as opposed to the "professional" category) the only salient differences in terms and conditions appeared to be that "academics" were expected to conduct research if they anticipated continuing employment (tenure) or promotion. Otherwise terms and conditions allowed identical opportunities for research and study leave (sabbatical leave), professional development leave, vacation, pension and other prerequisites—all of which were (and are) generous by Canadian standards. While the executive of the institution had some discretion in interpreting the "appropriateness" of requests for leave, in line with the actual activities of the staff member, most leaves were granted as requested. and there was little effort was made to monitor such leaves. Since the terms and conditions thus defined were generous and available to all, few "academics" (we can speculate) likely thought of actual expectations for their research productivity as different than for other professional members of staff. As well, it should be noted that the majority of academic appointments made prior to 1981 were at the lecturer or assistant professor level where research expectations were less onerous than at higher ranks given the focus upon course development and delivery.

The situation has shifted rather significantly since 1981. As pointed out in the previous analysis of the role of the academic, the diminishing role of Instructional Design as a unit, the birth of Administrative Studies as a new disciplinary thrust and the consolidation of humanities, social sciences, and sciences into Liberal Studies coupled with the more recent integration of instructional developers and editors into the academic areas have all lead to a recognition of the need to review the role of the academic, including renewed focus upon traditional academic expectations. Along with the challenge and freedom to conduct institutional and disciplinary research

goes the obligation to be evaluated and rewarded as an academic. Although we are currently struggling with this identity issue, it seems likely that some reasonable outcome will surface which recognizes the rather unique academic co-ordinator role at Athabasca University (i.e., course development and delivery) while, at the same time, safeguarding the more traditional expectations for research and discovery.

PART 4 - ACCOUNTING FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Introduction

My colleagues have presented several aspects of a case study of Athabasca University and the attempts of members of its senior academic administration to strengthen the institution's academic climate and credibility. This presentation will suggest different perspectives on what has been presented according to several theories of organization—the bureaucratic, collegial or democratic, and the political.

My basic premise is that the organizational changes were orchestrated by administrators, who, however sophisticated their knowledge of organizational theory and its applications to higher education, analyzed problems and proposed solutions from a traditional bureaucratic or structural functional perspective, with some attention to the collegial traditions and politics of the institution. Nevertheless, these analyses still could not explain a number of subsequent developments, an outcome of no surprise to Cohen and March (1974, p. 40):

> The logic of bureaucracy is the specification of objectives and technology. The logic of democracy is the organization of consent. The logic of collective bargaining is the discipline of conflict. The realities of higher education seem to be resistant to all these logics.

The remaining analysis will examine ways in which Cohen and March's (1974, chapter 9) "organized anarchy" approach may be helpful where the others fail to explain the outcomes of these decisions, and will offer a consequent perspective on its value to organizational theory.

The Modified Bureaucratic Model

From the time of the translation of Max Weber's classic work (1947), the bureaucratic model of organizations has been the predominant one, the starting point for all new theories.

Based on the work of Parsons (1960 ~~1947~~) and other structural functionalists, the Weberian bureaucracy has been modified to adapt it to modern organizations where professionals are employed. Although this work has been the target of ethnomethodologists (see, for example, Silverman, 1970) for two decades now, it remains the basis for most analytical writings about higher education, especially in the United States.

The modified bureaucratic model is a familiar one, stressing the primacy of clearly-defined goals, legal-rational authority institutionalized into hierarchical offices, formal rules and procedural specifications, equability through impersonality, and clear lines of authority based on the specialized technical competence of office holders.

As discussed earlier, there were compelling "bureaucratic" reasons for the reorganization of Athabasca University. Specifically, the organization was extremely flat and divided up into a number of quasi-independent "mini-fortresses". Such a model might have worked where there was a strong unifying commitment to a common mission or goals, but the fortresses to some extent at least represented separate ideologies and views as to the purpose of the institution.

Furthermore, almost all decision-making authority was vested in the hands of the president and vice-presidents with no significant middle management or deanship level. There was no formally adopted long-term plan, no operational planning process other than the annual scramble at budget time, and the prevailing social climate was one of immense insecurity arising from the pending, governmentally imposed relocation of the university.

There were equally obvious problems in terms of lines of communication and authority. Those with responsibility for ensuring that the courses were developed were separated from those who had the resources to carry this development out and from those who would be responsible for their delivery to students.

In short, it would have been clear to the most inexperienced student of organizations that a number of bureaucratic changes were necessary if the operation was to be successful. At the least, a strong emphasis on long range and operational planning, a more hierarchical organization of goals and responsibilities with a concomitant delegation of more authority to middle manage-

ment, a clarification of roles and responsibilities and clear attention to lines of communication, both formal and informal, were required.

At the same time, it was equally evident that bureaucratic changes alone would be unsuccessful. The structural changes in themselves were somewhat trivial and did not deal with a number of underlying problems, especially those of traditional academic expectations for process and consensus.

Collegial Model

In most of its dimensions, the collegial model (Millett, 1962) is the antithesis of the bureaucratic one. It stresses the academic community, decision-making by participation and consensus, and opposition to hierarchy, structure and impersonality. At the same time, as Parsons (1947) in particular has suggested, both the collegial and the bureaucratic models emphasize the importance of specialized technical competence, and it is that specialized competence that gives the professional working in the bureaucracy the personal authority to resist its traditional hierarchical authority of office.

As is common to small, young, so-called "innovative" institutions, AU's prevailing history was one that placed a high premium on collegiality, almost to the point of anarchy. Among its characteristics were a tendency for everyone to be involved in every decision; a high tolerance for individuality and different perspectives as to what the institution was all about; an emphasis on process over product; a sense that everything could be worked out if there were enough meetings to reach consensus; and a widespread distrust of administrative authority. These factors would combine to ensure that change, any change, would be resented if it was seen to have been imposed from above, or to be counter to the particular individual's view of the institution's history at the time. This historical view was exaggerated by the devastating impact of relocation which worked both in favour of change (at a time when everything is up in the air, there are fewer rigidities to overcome) and against it (when everyone is insecure, he or she will be cynical and even paranoid about any new changes).

However, again in common with the prevailing pattern, the collegial model began to break down at a time of rapid growth, stress and retrenchment. Collegiality can be seen very much as a "good times" phenomenon that gives way to the bureaucratic and political power bases when times are tough. The only exception to this at Athabasca was the tendency of some members of staff (especially those favouring the non-traditional aspects of the university's mission), who were totally frustrated by the amount of conflict around them, to advocate collegiality and unity as values above all others in an effort to minimize the levels of stress and insecurity. Others, however, characterized this as self-indulgent, anti-academic behaviour from the viewpoint that it was seen to emphasize "getting along" over the quest for higher professional standards.

Political Model

The political model (Baldridge, 1971) treats conflict as normal and healthy to an organization and focuses on the processes whereby special interest groups bargain for power and authority to achieve their own ends. As such, it usefully links the collegial to the bureaucratic by presenting a model that focuses on the process of how the inherent conflicts between the collegial and the bureaucratic are resolved in organizations like universities.

The historical realities and myths notwithstanding, it was clear from a political perspective that there was considerable underlying conflict at Athabasca University. Conflicting values were institutionalized into the various units and consensus was increasingly difficult to achieve. Academic staff had become more and more outspoken about the need for academic credibility and higher standards of research and course content. Their demand for "control" increasingly challenged the benefits of the previously espoused innovative model. The debate between traditional academics and Instructional Developers (IDs), ideally located within the course team, increasingly could be portrayed as a struggle for power and control within the institution.

The outspoken director of the instructional design unit was absent on research and study leave during this period, a factor that limited the strength of the ID group to resist the reorganization, especially as this denied the unit some of its informal access to central information, the currency of power in the political model.

The new vice-president had some possibility of capitalizing on a honeymoon period, but time was drawing on and there was great pressure for him to "do something". In this sense, the climate was ripe for action, but any such action would also meet strong resistance from one quarter or another. In fact, the vice-president had some allies for "the wrong reasons". While he had insisted that the move was intended as an organizational improvement that maintained the "ID perspective" and integrated it into the academic divisions, many of the traditional academics saw it as a victory over the instructional development model that had previously prevailed in the institution. Their status needs in the traditional academic world put pressure on the institution to "look more like" other universities, either to enhance their chances of getting jobs in more credible places or at least to enhance their status among colleagues elsewhere. Individual academics resented having to explain their strange titles ("coordinators"), absence of classroom teaching, unfamiliar academic ranks ("Academic Professional 2" instead of Associate Professor), continuous semesters, and other such reminders of deviations from traditional norms.

Two years later, at face value, it is possible to claim that these changes were achieved successfully. All academic and academic professional staff (faculty, instructional designers, editors) are now divided between Administrative and Liberal Studies, there is general acceptance of the model throughout the university and most agree that communication between academic and professional staff has improved considerably. At the same time, an analysis from the point of view of the organized anarchy model suggests some other concerns that would not otherwise be immediately apparent.

The Perspective Of The Organized Anarchy

The "organized anarchy" perspective (Cohen and March, 1974) accepts what other models deny—that ambiguity is the permanent state in an organization like a university. As such, this approach is extremely appealing to those who have been practitioners in such organizations.

Whether or not one agrees with Millett's (1980, p. 184) contention that universities generally have well defined goals, it is difficult to imagine an institution better corresponding to the "organized anarchy" prototype than Athabasca University. A quick review of the four categories of

ambiguity identified by Cohen and March offers an interesting perspective on the Athabasca case:

1. Ambiguity of Purpose:

> College presidents live within a normative context that presumes purpose and within an organizational context that denies it (Cohen and March, 1974, p. 197).

The variety of reactions to and perceptions of the organizational changes at Athabasca University were a produce of the varied and varying world views of the institution held by individuals and groups. One's analysis of the impact of the organizational changes will depend tremendously on what one sees to be the purpose of the university as a whole. For some, they represented the death knell of the idealism of the original innovative model and a selling out of the traditional academics. For others, they had the impact of undermining what, to them, had been a mythology of innovation, and of contributing to the emergence of the institution as an academically credible university.

2. Ambiguity of Power: The concept of power is extremely elusive in a university, as noted by Cohen and March:

> A person has power if he gets things done; if he has power, he can get things done (1974, p. 197).

At Athabasca, the vice-president had the requisite power to revise the organizational structure and did so. The changes have apparently been accepted even by those who opposed them initially, if only because those perceived to be in power were in favour of them. At the same time, a deeper analysis might challenge the extent to which the changes have really achieved anything and would focus on such questions as "Have the changes improved the instructional value of the courses?" and "Is it now more like a real university or does it just seem that way to traditional academic staff?" In the absence of tangible evidence, the answers will tend to be subjective, emanating from one's organizational paradigm, and hence somewhat ambiguous.

3. Ambiguity of Experience:

> Whenever the rate of experience is modest relative to the complexity of the phenomena and the rate of change in the phenomena, the interpretation made of experience will tend to be more per-

suasive subjectively than it should be. (Cohen and March, 1974, p. 200).

As suggested above, the organizational changes at Athabasca were seen by most to be fundamental and fairly dramatic, but they meant different things to different people. Given their relative "success", it is probable that the administrators responsible for the changes would be encouraged to "meddle" with the organization in similar ways in the future, begging the question as to whether the structural functional changes alone actually achieved anything in improving the instructional content or academic climate of the university.

4. Ambiguity of Success:

> What happens today will be rationalized tomorrow as what was desired (Cohen and March, 1974, p. 203).

While it is true that outcomes often flow from goals, it may frequently be the case that the goals flow from outcomes. In the case of the organizational changes at Athabasca, hindsight suggests that the predominant goal was to do "something" and to be seen to have done something—many of the explanations for the reorganization came afterwards. Once the prevailing sociology determined that the changes had been "right", the body of supporting arguments was enhanced by the addition of new rationales that had not been part of the original justification for the reorganization.

Other aspects of Cohen and March's analysis also fit the Athabasca case. At the university, the information systems were weak (who really knew what made for the best courses?), a common reaction to the ambiguity and stress was increasingly low salience and high inertia, and the issue was sufficiently polarized to become a convenient "garbage can" for faculty concerns. At the same time, the bureaucratic changes could be seen as giving the vice-president the satisfaction of feeling that he had and could be seen to have dealt with the problem. (Academic administrators do each other favours by setting up organizations that their successors have to undo, thereby perpetuating the notion that each is gradually improving the organization rather than replacing each other's mistakes by their own).

Cohen and March's (1974, p. 225 - 229) emphasis on Play and Reason also has some valuable lessons for practising administrators.

1. "Treat goals as hypotheses"—The university's experience with the apparent circularity of some of these issues, and the push and pull between innovation and traditional values, underscore the elusive nature of basic goals for a university, especially one with as integrated a model as Athabasca. The only basic goal may well be survival; goals are hypotheses at best and the testing of these hypotheses one week may yield substantially different results from the same testing a week later.

2. "Treat intuition as real"—the ID/Editorial change could be rationalized under any of the existing theoretical models, but most of the changes were intuitive. They gave the impression of dealing with "the" problem although the problem was never clearly defined and many problems of course design remain.

3. "Treat hypocrisy as transition"—For many of the original staff of the university, the "ID model" had been the hallmark of what was different (and presumably better) about Athabasca, and hence they were extremely concerned about the major shift in values that the reorganization could be seen to represent. In fact, only a handful of staff continue to espouse the non-traditional values under the new model, a scant two years after the reorganization. Hence, it may be suggested that only lip-service was being paid to the "ID" model and that the reorganization was merely official recognition of a value shift that had already taken place.

4. "Treat memory as an enemy"—a point well to be remembered by those of us making this presentation. Any relationship between this portrayal and what actually happened may be circumstantial.

5. "Treat experience as a theory"—the prevailing sociology has changed so quickly at the university that the retrospective views of these events are constantly changing. As well, hindsight has added a degree of logic and rationality that was never a part of the original decision-making. It is the wise academic leader who treats each new challenge as a unique event, the ultimate value of experience being that it can never be assumed that what "worked" in the past will work again

today.

The series of decisions surrounding the reorganization, then, can be portrayed as effective "garbage cans" for all the major issues at Athabasca University during this period. For traditional academic staff threatened by the forced relocation of the university, it offered some hope of an increase in personal status and in the academic credibility of the university. For non-traditional staff, it reinforced their worst fears about a new administration that didn't understand the dangers of giving so much power to traditional academics. If the changes didn't resolve the ambiguity, they at least institutionalized it and gave an illusion of progress and maturity.

On the face of it, then, the organized anarchy model offers some interesting insights into the outcomes of the changes presented in this study. It is particularly appealing to those who have suffered through these decisions because of its somewhat irreverent suggestion that "many of the axioms and standard procedures of management collapse" (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 4) when goals are problematic, technology is unclear and participation is fluid. In such an environment, the results are largely serendipitous and the primary actors can absolve themselves of any "blame" for unintended consequences.

Problems With Anarchic Model

Despite the immense appeal of the "organized anarchy" perspective, there are dangers in giving it the status of a "model".[1] It is not so much a model as a rationale, a frustrated reaction to the failure of organizational theory to explain so much of what does on in an organization. In this sense, it contributes more to what Burrell and Morgan (1979, chapter 9) have termed "anti-organisation theory" than to organizational theory. In particular:

i) It makes us much less anxious about our failings by minimizing the importance of our roles. A good president is one who serves in good times; a bad one is the unfortunate who is caught by bad times, (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 204).

[1] It is other writers, not Cohen and March, who tend to refer to it as a mode. See, for example, Chaffee (1983) and Richman and Farmer (1974).

ii) Ironically, it ascribes status to the rare administrator who is not preoccupied with his or her own status.

iii) It "explains" the unexplainable. If I accept that there can be no consensus of goals, if I accept that intuition is real, if I accept that meaning will always be ambiguous, I can accept anything. It is a religion more than a science. It helps me to feel better but it doesn't help me to prescribe or to explain—it helps me to "explain away" rather than explain.

Nevertheless, this approach is very appealing to those who, though they should know better by now, continue to analyze problems from a structural functionalist perspective and still manage some bewilderment when their best laid plans go awry.

The ultimate usefulness of the "organized anarchy" approach is similar to that provided by the ethnomethodologists in the sociology of organizations. It offers a very timely dose of realism, pricks the balloon of self-importance and offers humour and sensible foolishness to a field that frequently takes itself too seriously. It does not, however, provide us with an alternative model that satisfies its very helpful critique of the more established bureaucratic, collegial and political models. We should not lessen its value by giving it a status it doesn't deserve. Or, as one battle-scarred administrator put it, "the things we don't understand, we explain to each other."

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Figure 1

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, September 1977

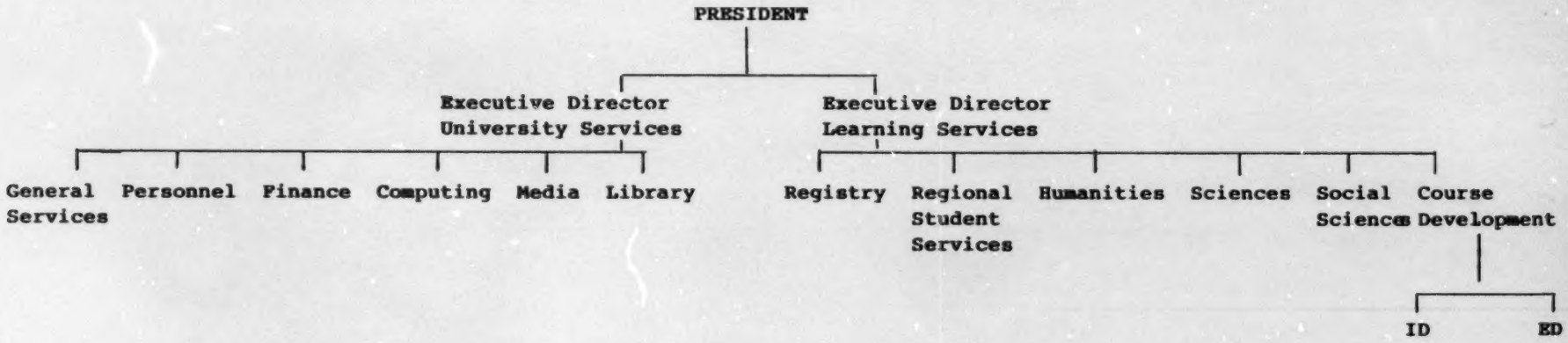

Figure 2

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, September 1984